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C O N F I D E N T I A L PRETORIA 000152

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FAA PASS TO MCINTRON, NANGELO
DAKAR PASS TO FAA

E.O. 12958: DECL: 11/29/2016

TAGS: [EAIR](#) [ECON](#) [SF](#)

SUBJECT: SOUTH AFRICA CIVIL AVIATION AUTHORITY WORKS TO
MAINTAIN ITS FAA CATEGORY ONE FLIGHT SAFETY STATUS

REF: A. PRETORIA 03768

[1](#)B. STATE 146840

Classified By: A/DCM Perry Ball, Reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

[1](#)1. (C) Summary. The South African Civil Aviation Authority (SACAA) has made some progress but must take additional corrective actions in order to maintain its desirable Category One status when the Federal Aviation Administration (FAA) conducts a technical review in May. SACAA has been working with FAA to improve operations since September through a series of SACAA-funded technical consultations. Significant progress must be made toward improving qualifications of inspectors and aviation law before the FAA's next technical consultation visit in March. Failure to make progress could result in South Africa's designation by the FAA as a Category Two country. SACAA is committed to making the necessary improvements required to maintain Category One designation. End Summary.

Background

[1](#)2. (C) FAA conducted a technical review of SACAA in June 2006 to determine compliance with aviation flight safety oversight standards issued by the International Civil Aviation Organization (ICAO). FAA found that South Africa does not meet several ICAO standards. Failure to meet ICAO standards could result in the FAA making a determination to change South Africa's designation from a desirable Category One to Category Two status. Post advised SACAA of FAA findings and SACAA agreed in September to have FAA perform a series of SACAA-funded technical consultation visits in order to improve compliance.

Status

[1](#)3. (C) Two out of four planned technical consultation visits have been completed, one in September and the other in December. At the conclusion of the December visit, post learned from FAA that there may not be sufficient time before FAA's May review for South Africa to achieve compliance in two critical areas: inspector qualifications and aviation law. Other problem areas were also identified by the FAA. Post awaits a full report from the FAA.

Problems with Inspector Qualifications

¶4. (C) ICAO standards require that civil aviation inspectors have at least the same level of aircraft-specific technical qualifications as the individuals they oversee. FAA found that for several types of aircraft, SACAA does not have inspectors with these qualifications. SACAA committed during the December consultation visit to hire and train new inspectors. During a January 10 meeting with econoff SACAA admitted that despite concerted recruitment efforts it has not been successful in hiring the new inspectors. The inspectors must not only be hired and trained on specific aircraft but also then perform oversight functions for several months before their presence can be acknowledged in the May FAA review.

Problems with Aviation Law

¶5. (C) The primary aviation law of South Africa is the Aviation Act of 1962 (the Aviation Act) and the Civil Aviation Authority Act of 1998 (the SACAA Act). The FAA found that the two acts, taken together, present a confusing and inefficient structure for aviation flight safety oversight. The December FAA technical consultation visit team included an FAA legal expert who advised SACAA on making short and long-term improvements. The legal expert told econoff that if the short-term improvements are implemented and progress made toward long-term improvements before the May review, South Africa may maintain Category One status. However, the expert expressed concern that the SACAA board and executive management may not reach agreement on the recommended improvements in a timely fashion because these will require changes to the SACAA organizational authority and responsibility.

High Stakes

¶6. (C) Loss of Category One status would bring many complications, particularly since South African parastatal airline South African Airways (SAA) is looking at route expansion. This would not be allowed under Category Two status. If SACAA goes to Category Two, the air carriers SACAA regulates (primarily SAA) will be subject to more frequent spot checks at U.S. airports, the U.S. Department of Defense will likely put South African carriers on its "non-use" list, and U.S. air carriers such as SAA code-share partner United would not be allowed to put their code on services operated by South African carriers. Comment: Delta is also considering a code-share arrangement with domestic carrier Nationwide Airlines. End Comment. Adverse media coverage should also be expected if a Category Two designation is made since South Africa is undergoing significant expansion of aviation capabilities in preparation for hosting the 2010 World Cup.

Comment

¶7. (C) Comment: FAA returns to South Africa in early March for its third round of technical consultations. At the conclusion of the March visit post will know with greater certainty whether or not South Africa is likely to retain its Category One status. SACAA wants to avoid the loss of Category One and is committed to making the necessary improvements. SACAA board members and executive staff have repeatedly expressed their willingness and commitment to cooperate with the USG and to improve SACAA operations as soon as possible. End Comment.
BOST